

Statement by Representative James A. Leach  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific  
Hearing on "The South Asia Earthquake:  
Impact and Humanitarian Response  
October 20, 2005

On behalf of the Subcommittee, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished witnesses. We are appreciative of your expertise and your commitment to public service.

The subject of our hearing this afternoon is the U.S. and international response to the catastrophic earthquake that devastated much of Pakistan and parts of India on October 8, 2005. All Americans are united in expressing their condolences to the families of the victims of this tragedy. The case for prompt humanitarian assistance to the many thousands throughout the region affected by this calamity is compelling.

As our witnesses will describe in more detail, aftershocks continue to traumatize the beleaguered populace in the affected Himalayan areas of India and Pakistan. Meanwhile, courageous efforts to provide humanitarian assistance have been hampered by the daunting terrain and the onset of the Himalayan winter, as well as the damage wrought to transportation and related infrastructure.

To date, India has recorded approximately 1,400 fatalities and the government of Pakistan has confirmed approximately 50,000 deaths, while local officials suggest that the final figures may be substantially higher. Tens of thousands of people were injured in the quake zone, the vast majority of them in Pakistan-controlled areas of Kashmir. While there are many pressing humanitarian needs around the globe, providing immediate shelter, food and health care to the victims of this disaster must be considered an urgent international priority.

In this extraordinary circumstance, the United Nations, the United States, many other individual countries and non-governmental organizations have come together in a common effort to provide comfort and relief to the thousands whose lives have been devastated by this catastrophe.

Unfortunately, the response to date is clearly inadequate. Perhaps because of the tsunami, perhaps because of the hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and now Wilma, donor fatigue is a real problem. Unfortunately, also, problems of terrain and weather are compounded by the number of injuries. In the tsunami, loss of life was far greater, probably by a magnitude of four, but injuries were fewer. Victims were either drowned or they survived with limbs in place. This earthquake in a mountainous

region is different than a shore-line phenomenon. Many arms and legs have been broken and even amputated. Livelihoods have been totally disrupted in the face of a harsh winter clime.

In this sobering context, we look forward to your assessment of the current situation in the affected region and a description of current U.S. relief efforts, as well as the tasks that lie ahead.

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